

IMPACT BASED WARNING FOR SEVERE WEATHER EVENTS – REFLECTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS FROM A DISASTER MANAGEMENT / HUMANITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

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The international decade of natural disaster reduction (1990-2000) and the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015) have rightly called for an increased investment in the various aspects of DRR, including risk reduction, preparedness for response, governance structures and legislation, better understanding of the hazards, etc. As a result, in practically all regions there have been many technical/scientific capacity building initiatives in many developing countries involving the met services and other scientific organisations, likewise a lot of DRR initiatives (under HFA from a range of donors and agencies), involving development agencies and focusing on medium- to long-term development (legislation, national and (multi-)sectoral planning to integrate DRR, etc.), as well as the more response oriented organisations (emergency management organizations).

While a lot of investment has been made within specialist areas, sectors and networks, communication, coordination and collaboration between these networks and areas of expertise has often been weak. In that respect the “mainstreaming of DRR” (an HFA buzz word!) has probably been the weakest aspect of 10 years of HFA work....

Typically this challenge also exists, in my opinion, around the issue of early warning for severe weather events (SWE). The scientific information is available, but does often not reach responders or communities at risk in the right format. Where from a disaster management/humanitarian perspective we can make relatively easy wins is in providing the scientific data and analysis on extreme weather events (cyclones, floods, drought, etc.) to the DM/HA community in a manner that is understandable for DM decision-makers and operational responders, as well as communities at risk that can self-prepare and protect.

There is a critical and leading role here for the met services to make this translation/interpretation and reach out to the DM community - the NDMA's specifically but also very much relevant sectors, the general public and specifically communities at risk of these events. Hence interpretation of the scientific analysis and appropriate communication is key. Given that the mandate and specialisation of the met services is clear and undisputed, the initiative for this outreach lies clearly with the met services and a case to have “a place at the table” and tap into necessary (financial) support (from Government or donors) should be obvious.

The focus needs to be on the provision of services and products to relevant users /target audiences that are relevant (impact based and allow preventative action) and will thus create a demand by the users. This in turn will empower the Met services.

In this respect there will be, typically in many developing countries (low income and middle income countries), specific users and user networks that are at the same time channels to reach communities at risk:

- Nationally:
 - o the National Disaster Management Authority

- a national disaster council or committee – an executive inter-ministerial government body with representation at senior level (minister/secretary) , often chaired by paramount ministry or PM’s office, with secretariat function by the NDMA. Sometimes with National Red Cross society representation as well. NMHS should be member of such group.
- a national operational inter-agency or ministerial coordination body with reps at secretary or director level, often with Red Cross representation and sometimes UN and NGO representation. Likewise NMHS should be member.
- UN Country Team with reps from UN agencies, chaired by UN Resident Coordinator
- Humanitarian Country Team, UN agencies and main international organisations (IFRC, INGO’s) with humanitarian activity – chaired by UNRC/Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA, (when in country).
- Inter-Cluster Coordination group – meeting of cluster coordinators. Operational group under the HCT. Increasingly, national ministries will be co-leading the clusters.
- Humanitarian Clusters - International organisations coordinating their work in the same humanitarian sector: Health, WASH, Food security, Shelter, Camp coordination, Education, Logistics, etc.
- Regionally:
 - In many (sub-) regions there will be a regional humanitarian coordination mechanism with representation from key international agencies and cluster. These regional groups will also be looking at specific forecasts of SWEs, for national and regional impacts. NMHS or RSMC can provide relevant information to these agencies.
- Globally:
 - At the global level, likewise humanitarian agencies and bilateral donors/member states will be looking for similar EW information on SWE. Currently there is a lack of an authoritative source of information and forecast is probably sought from a variety of sources.

Particularly for the NMHS it is important to be a standing member of the national coordination bodies, while having its information products distributed and used in the other, non-governmental fora. Ideally, NMHS should play an advisory role to these groups as well. Having credible information that informs preparedness and response actions is the selling point that will provide NMHS’s its added value in these critical situations.

Apart from the above, NMHSs should have also have a well defined strategy, role and relationship with the local and national media to have also direct access to communities at risk with specific warnings on SWEs. At least one or more common (national) recognized channels should be identified with SOPs on dissemination of relevant forecast, such as:

- National broadcasting authority (dedicated national radio and TV channel and national news agency if existing)
- NDMA and other emergency services

From the above follows that a specific communication strategy needs to be thought of. One the best overall guidance, is the following from IOM:

<http://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/Country/docs/Humanitarian-Communications-Pakistan-2014.pdf>

It focuses on Pakistan as a case study, but is also quite general.

These CDAC (Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities) Network tools could also be helpful: <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/tools-and-checklists/>